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ABSTRACT

Gender, a fundamental organizing principle of human societies, should be integral to world history survey courses. Students need to learn about the various distinctions of gender that have divided the sexes throughout history. As there is little time to squeeze more explanatory factors into a world history syllabus, it is critical to establish early that discerning the social meanings of male and female is one historical theme. It is important to remind students that the course is addressing women and men whose collective activity is consequential. Teachers also must incorporate gender topics into testing. The division of labor, and student misconceptions about it, is a useful topic for gender discussion. Instructors may have to avoid unanswerable topics such as the role of the goddesses in antiquity and the origin of patriarchy. Early in the course, women may be angered and men may feel guilty about the low status of women throughout history. It is important to underscore societies in which women held high status. Furthermore, the resistance of Native American women to European oppression offers important lessons about colonialism. For any such course there are invaluable resources available. Contains 13 endnotes. (SG)

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Session #78: Matters of Content: Innovative Paradigms for Teaching the World History Survey Course

Title of Paper: Gender at the Base of World History

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Gender is one fundamental organizing principle of human societies. As such, it should be integral to world history survey courses -- as basic as economic systems, growth of cities and states, trade, conquest, or religion. Students need to learn about the changing and various distinctions of gender that have divided the lives of women and men from prehistory to the modern period. Pervasive assumptions that women have always kept house and cared for children should yield to knowledge about women's productive labor in gathering and growing crops, in weaving textiles in homes and factories, in marketing, and in providing essential social services. Considering gender reveals critical differences in the family foundations of societies -- varying from how marriages were contracted and ancestry calculated to how property was transferred and classes formed. That women had no public role in classical Athens is relevant to democratic theory and to understanding why American women's demand for voting rights was ridiculed before 1920. Whether considering religion, literacy, health, art, slavery, war, or trade, gender usually mattered and to teach world history accurately, we need to explore this and explain how it mattered.

Judith Zinsser, in History and Feminism: A Glass Half Full, points out that it has been nearly twenty years since women historians called for systematic analysis of gender relationships as a "fundamental category of historical thought" [1] Except among p rs like Steve Gosch, this has not happened in university

world history courses.[2] Instead, a few women may be added, usually to discussions of Western societies -- added to what is not human history, but men's history. If you doubt this, recollect discussions of the modern democratic state; what meaning does "democracy" have if half of adults are disfranchised? Do your students learn about women's access to basic civil and political rights in the twentieth century? Do they know that women voted in Thailand and Turkey before they did in France?[3] There is, I believe, more leadership at the secondary school level, exhibited in state mandates that women be included in history courses and in curriculum transformation efforts, such as Philadelphia's Women in World History Project, which is creating units parallel to the district's model world history syllabus. A weakness of this approach is already apparent, however; it is hard to "add and stir" women into an impersonal batter. Comparative history needs rethinking to incorporate significant patterns of masculine and feminine behavior.[4]

My title, "Gender at the Base of World History," is, then, more reflective of intention, than of what I actually accomplish now working within the traditional paradigm. I teach three sections of world history each semester in a department where forty sections are scheduled; I use standard textbooks and conform to departmental guidelines of chronology, extent of reading, writing assignments, and exams. So what I propose is a pragmatic approach to incorporating gender within the framework

of world history as it is now conceived. Five years ago this was difficult, but the proliferation of new resources --both theoretical and empirical -- makes doing so easier each year.

I think about gender in planning courses -- considering how it might fit with each topic, and about where the ordinary texts or organization omit critical gendered historical developments. Squeezing more explanatory factors into a world history syllabus is hard, and I can devote few classes only to gender. So, it is critical to establish early that discerning the social meanings of male and female is one major historical theme. This is stated in my course description and reenforced in syllabus topics.

In selecting required readings, gender is a primary focus of at least one book. It might be explicit, as in Sarah Pomeroy's Goddesses, Whores, Wives and Slaves: Women in Classical Antiquity, or embedded in a text like Jonathan Spence's The Death of Woman Wang. I find that students who have learned to look at history in gendered ways find evidence of its patterns even in books chosen to illustrate other historical factors -- such as the Chinese Judge Dee mysteries. In designing written assignments based on readings, I've learned to leave open the selection of themes so that students may analyze gender, or avoid it. It is particularly important in a required general education course to avoid making male or female students believe that feminism -- a feared and hated word among Shippensburg freshmen - being forced on them. Even when I assigned Gerda Lerner's

Creation of Patriarchy, suggested themes for papers included some gender-neutral topics.

In the classroom, I mention gender regularly in lectures and discussions. World history has a tendency to omit actual people -- even most famous men -- in favor of broad impersonal, but implicitly masculine, forces. I try to remind students that we are talking about women and men whose collective behavior is consequential. Seeing gender can become habitual. Teach them to look at television news shots as vignettes of people, not unlike themselves, and to see gender patterns when the street demonstrators or soldiers are overwhelmingly male or when the refugees are only women and children, as the United Nations estimates 70-80 percent today are. What we have seen this past year in Somalia and Bosnia makes it easier to understand how warfare in the ancient Near East and North Africa so often led to enslavement of women. Often it takes very little class time to indicate the gender-specificity of war, slavery, education, migration, or citizenship in the state. Thorough analysis of masculinity and femininity is never possible in a survey, and generalized types are more necessary than I like, but there is usually time to be accurate in using the words human, male and female, as well as gendered pronouns.

Because students believe grades are important, gender must also be incorporated in testing. Questions of fact and analysis appear regularly in my multiple-choice items and essays. I distribute study questions prior to essay exams, and intersperse

gender topics among more traditional ones. Here are samples from several semesters for the period 1300 to 1500 A.D.:

(1) Were the ideals for women's behavior developed in classical Islamic societies practiced by the women of 14th-century Cairo? [5]

(2) If, in a previous life, you were a young, unmarried person born into a family of ordinary wealth about 1400, would you choose to have been born in (a) Western Europe, (b) Southeast Asia, or (c) Peruvian Inca society? Explain your choice of gender and geography as you compare and contrast daily life in these places.[6]

(3) Describe the character and lifestyle of a typical Italian Renaissance man. Where was he born? How was he educated? What were his values or beliefs? How did he spend his time?

These topics draw upon social or intellectual history; economic and political history are also important to the project of engendering world history.

Few issues are as critical as the division of labor, beginning with prehistoric gathering and hunting societies. Student misconceptions are so deeply entrenched that I spend one class on the importance of women's gathering to sustenance of their families, on their participation in some hunting activities, on patterns of shared childcare, and on the relative equality anthropologists find in later similar societies. Gender and Anthropology, published by the American Anthropological

Association, has useful essays and suggestions for class projects that range from primates to modern gathering-hunting peoples.[7] The transition from foraging to agricultural societies may be included in this unit, or developed later. What is important is to stress that both women and men participated in producing vegetative and animal food. Human societies depended on productive labor by most adults, but usually divided it into male and female tasks. A book that is comparative and useful in its categorization of gendering in agriculture is Ester Boserup's Woman's Role in Economic Development.[8] As we encounter new regions and new crops, women's farming responsibilities can be quickly introduced. As trade develops, who owns and has the right to market various agricultural products needs to be established when possible.

Early in the first semester we also discuss food processing and cooking. Students tend to equate women's domestic work with what they know, with the spacious houses they know -- that are full of appliances, furniture, linens and clothes. Before 1800, most women and men lived in small, sparsely-furnished spaces, had few clothes, and spent far more time producing rudimentary products for survival. I also introduce early in the course the variability of gender assignment of other tasks of hand manufacture: spinning, weaving, potting, leather work, building construction; but the tendency for blacksmithing and metalwork to be done by men. Slides are useful -- particularly those that show African men sitting at a loom or women building a house. My

intention is to shake the students' received notions of "natural" gender patterns and to make them question relationships of work and power between the sexes in any historical society.

In world history classes, I avoid several unanswerable issues of the prehistorical era. One is the role of goddesses. Another is the origin of patriarchy. I find Gerda Lerner's exploration of patriarchy's historic beginnings too narrow because of its Western bias. Furthermore, historical evidence does not suggest to me a single pattern of male oppression of women, but much more complex negotiations of power. Rather than trying to explain why or how men subjugated women, I demonstrate how patriarchy was associated with the major ancient civilizations of Mesopotamia, Persia, Greece, China, India, and Rome. We discuss how the benefits of civilized life most often arose beside domination of women, class inequalities, and slavery. Discussion of the explicit inequality of women and men embedded in law, marriage, philosophy, religion, and government is shocking to many of my students. Athens and China are important examples both because one need add only a little to the facts in textbooks and because the philosophies of Plato, Aristotle and Confucius influenced conceptions of male and female for millenia in broad regions. In Athens, where the conception of manhood is central to the society, the intertwining of gender, age, sexuality and power offers an opportunity to introduce homosexuality. Sarah Pomeroy's Goddesses, Whores, and Slaves discusses gender in both Greece and Rome. Within

the Mediterranean, Egyptian women had relatively high status, with more choices in marriage, work, and law than their Asian or European neighbors. Yet they were as likely to be slaves. Hatshepsut and Cleopatra had little in common with their serving women. Establishing the privileges of free women in dynastic Egypt sets a stage for showing significant Egyptian influence on women's rising status in the Hellenistic Mediterranean and East Africa.[9]

Sometime in the first semester student consternation and depression mounts over women's seeming perpetual and universal low status. This may appear among male students who are overwhelmed with guilt. There is a concomitant tendency to leap to the false conclusion that everything was terrible until the American Revolution liberated women. So, it is important to deal with societies besides Egypt in which women had high status. I rely on a unit on Southeast Asia, based largely on readings from Anthony Reid's Southeast Asia in the Age of Commerce. Here, women were thought to be more competent than men in business, were more often literate, and expected sexual satisfaction from men. The beauty of this picture for female students is marred by a preference for blackened teeth, tattooed bodies, and androgynous dressing, while male students may be horrified by descriptions of genital surgery to enhance men's appeal to women. Discussion of gender in Southeast Asia serves a further purpose of illustrating the selectivity of Indian and Chinese influences. I [illegible] only looks at the Buddhist temples of Pagan, Borobudor or

Angkor Wat, India's influence can seem overwhelming; persistence of diametrically different ideals of masculinity and femininity suggests more complex cultural interaction. Lorraine Gesick first showed me that in medieval Thailand local women merchants enabled foreign men to maintain long-distance trade. Once observed, this practice can be found on continents beyond Southeast Asia. One day, I believe gender will transform our understanding not only of trade, but of the spread of religion and culture. Think about the meaning to be deconstructed from a textbook phrase such as "Muslim traders spread Islam as they married local women." This implies that agency or power was male, while closer scrutiny may reveal how tenuous his position as a foreigner was.

My final example concerns gender and colonialism. I find the Peruvian case useful, for Irene Silverblatt, in Moon, Sun, and Witches, briefly explicates how the Incas used gender to solidify their conquests of adjacent peoples and then how the Spanish imposition of European gender ideology both enhanced their control of Andean peoples and oppressed women especially. Andean women's resistance to loss of status earned them prosecution as witches in the seventeenth century. The role of gender in European conquest of the Americas can also be explored in examples drawn from Canadian Hurons or the New Mexican pueblos.[10] Kathleen M. Brown suggests considering "the relationship between gender and colonialism" as "cultural encounters... occurring along gender frontiers...." Such gender

frontiers were not distinct from economic, linguistic, political or religious confrontations, but pervaded these aspects of culture, with each society defining its gender categories as "natural." Brown concludes that "the struggle of competing groups for the power that comes with controlling definitions of 'the natural' makes gender frontiers a useful concept for understanding colonial encounters."[11] Exploring these issues might extend into the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, for Africanists have developed a significant body of work connecting European exploitation of gender with the slave trade, colonization, capitalism and Apartheid.[12] Perhaps only the literature on women and the welfare state compares to it in significance for world history. I have scarcely touched on the modern period, because it is easier to incorporate gender as sources become more plentiful and women move from the household into the public arena. A final recommendation is perhaps the most important. The indispensable source everyone needs is a volume of short interpretative essay and bibliographies, published by the Organization of American Historians, entitled Restoring Women to History: Teaching Packets for Integrating Women's History into Courses on Africa, Asia, Latin America, the Caribbean and the Middle East.[13]

1. Judith P. Zinsser, History and Feminism: A Glass Half Full (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1993) citing Joan Kelly's essay on "The Social Relations of the Sexes," p. 40.

2. Stephen S. Gosch, "Using Documents to Integrate the History of Women into World History Courses," World History Bulletin, vol. 5, no. 1 (Fall/Winter 1987-1988).

3. The World's Women, 1970-1990: Trends and Statistics (New York: The United Nations, 1991), Table 3 lists the year of women's gaining the right to vote in all countries, with Thailand in 1932, Turkey in 1934, and France in 1944. The volume contains extensive data on work, households, education, and health.

4. For a beginning, see Cheryl Johnson-Odim and Margaret Strobel, "Conceptualizing the History of Women in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, and the Middle East," Journal of Women's History, vol. 1, no. 1 (Spring 1989).

5. Huda Lutfi, "Manners and Customs of Fourteenth-Century Cairene Women: Female Anarchy Versus Male Shar'i Order in Muslim Prescriptive Treatises," in Nikki R. Keddie and Beth Baron, eds., Women in Middle Eastern History (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), a reserve library reading, was the basis for this essay. This reading is more successful in revealing the complexity of women in Islamic cultures than others I have tried.

6. Reserve library readings from Anthony Reid, Southeast Asia in the Age of Commerce, 1450-1680, volume 1: The Lands Below the Winds (New Haven: Yale University, 1988) and Irene Silverblatt, Moon, Sun, and Witches: Gender Ideologies and Class in Inca and Colonial Peru (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987) were the basis of this question, along with John P. McKay, B. Hill, and J. Buckler, A History of World Societies, volume 1, 3rd ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1992).

7. Sandra Morgen, ed., Gender and Anthropology: Critical Reviews for Research and Teaching (Washington: American Anthropological Society, 1989). Kevin Reilly, ed., Readings in World Civilizations, volume 1: The Great Traditions, 2nd ed. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992) has a useful section.

8. Ester Boserup, Woman's Role in Economic Development (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1970).

9. See Gay Robins, Women in Ancient Egypt (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993) and Sarah B. Pomeroy, Women in Hellenistic Egypt From Alexander to Cleopatra (New York: Schocken Books, 1984).

10. Karen Anderson, Chain Her by One Foot: The Subjugation of Women in Seventeenth-Century New France (London: Routledge, 1991); Ramon A. Gutierrez, When Jesus Came, the Corn Mothers Went Away: Marriage, Sexuality, and Power in New Mexico, 1500-1846 (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1991).

11. Kathleen M. Brown, "Brave New Worlds: Women's and Gender History," The William and Mary Quarterly, 3rd series, vol 1, no. 2 (April 1993), 318-319. This is a fine guide to gender literature of the European/African/Americas frontiers of 1500-1800.

12. Cherryl Walker, ed., Women and Gender in Southern Africa to 1945 (London: James Currey, 1990); Elizabeth Schmidt, Peasants, Traders, and Wives: Shona Women in the History of Zimbabwe, 1870-1939 (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1992); Claire Robertson and Iris Berger, eds., Women and Class in Africa (New York: Holmes and Meier, (1986); and Sharon Stichter and Jane Parpart, eds., Patriarchy and Class: African Women in the Home and Workforce (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1988).

13. Edited by Cheryl Johnson-Odim and Margaret Strobel in 1988, the volume is available in paperback from the OAH for $20.00.